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A N
A T T E M P T
TO PROMOTE
THE FREQUENT DISPENSING
OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Author had no leisure to revise this Essay. A Manuscript was sent him sometime ago, from an unknown hand, occasioned by the Blacksmith's Letter. He wishes to know to whom it should be returned.

A, N
A T T E M P T, &c.

S E C T I O N I.

THE prejudices of many pious and well disposed people, against the late overture of the synod of Glasgow and Ayr, concerning frequent communicating (*a*), make it necessary to acquaint them with the reasons on which that overture was founded, that men of honest minds may

(*a*) The overture of the synod of Glasgow and Ayr, Glasgow, 5th October 1748, was as follows:

A proposal from the presbytery of Glasgow, concerning the more frequent celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, being laid before the synod by their committee of overtures, the synod appointed a select committee to consider thereof, who reported as follows:

The committee humbly propose the following articles to the consideration of the very reverend synod; wherein they are unanimous in their judgment.

That the general proposal from the reverend presbytery of Glasgow, deserves the serious regard and attention of the synod.

That it would have an evident tendency to the reviving and promoting of true religion, that the Lord's Supper should be more frequently administered among us, than what generally obtains, that holy ordinance being celebrated only once a year in each parish, (excepting in a few places) and, in some parishes, but once in two years.

That, if this be allowed, we must add, that the manner in which this holy ordinance is commonly administered among us, greatly obstructs the more frequent administration of it; and particularly the number of sermons on such occasions, and the many parishes thereby laid vacant on the Lord's Day, are accompanied with

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may see if there is cause for that strange and hideous outcry which has been raised against it.

Others, better qualified for such a task, have thought fit to decline it. Several of my fathers and brethren, both at the meeting of synod, and since, have urged me to undertake it: But their sollicita-

with several great inconveniencies, if not also, too often with scandalous profanations of that holy Day.

That from all this the committee are of opinion, it would be for the interest and honour of religion, that some method were devised, whereby these inconveniencies and abuses might be avoided, and the Lord's Supper more frequently celebrated, agreeably to the word of God, to the apostolic practice recorded therein, to the practice of the primitive church, and that of all other Protestant churches, as well as to several overtures and acts of assembly of this church in former times.

That, in the opinion of the committee, it would answer this purpose, if the Lord's Supper were celebrated at least four times a year, in every parish; and that only one day in the preceding week, either the Friday or Saturday, were employed in public fasting or preparation, and that the sacrament were administered on the same Sabbath in all the parishes of the same presbytery at least.

And lastly, That it may be proper the synod appoint the several presbyteries of their bounds to meet for considering the above proposal, and report their judgment on the several articles thereof to the synod, in April next, in order to the framing of an overture from their synod to be transmitted to next general assembly; and that this be communicated to the correspondents, to be laid before the neighbouring synods, at their next meeting.

The synod, having heard and considered the above report, did approve of the same, and accordingly transmitted, &c.



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solicitations would scarce have moved me to publish any thing on the subject, so crude and indigested as what follows, had not some circumstances convinced me, that the silence of those who are convinced of the goodness of the overture has had much worse effects, than could have flowed from even the weakest defence.

The question, whether the synod's overture should be rejected or approved, depends on two subordinate inquiries. Is the design of dispensing the Lord's Supper in every congregation, at least four times a year, in itself good? And are the means proposed for gaining that end, the most proper, and least exceptionable?

§ 2. Let us begin with enquiring if the design of dispensing the Sacrament thus often is in itself a good one.---And here let us for once suppose, that there is no Scripture precept or pattern obliging us to frequent communicating.

Supposing this, it must at least be allowed, there is no restraint laid upon us, in the word of God, from partaking frequently of the Lord's Supper. If no precise time is fixed in Scripture for dispensing and receiving it, and if no precise degree of frequency is enjoined, yet none dare alledge, that there is any time in which we are prohibited to dispense and receive that ordinance, or that any degree of frequency is absolutely prohibited. From this it follows, that we are left at liberty to dispense the Lord's Supper as often as is consistent with the right performance of other religious exercises, and the due discharge of the common duties of life.

And if such a measure of frequency is lawful, may I not venture a step further, and pronounce it, if not necessary, yet at least in the highest degree

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gree expedient? If the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of so comforting and improving a nature, as almost all acknowledge it, should we not account the frequent enjoyment of it a privilege? And if God has not deprived us of that privilege, do we act a wise and friendly part for our own souls, in depriving ourselves of it?

To give this argument its due force, let us consider a little the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, and what benefits may be expected by those who worthily receive it.

It is the ordinance our Lord Jesus has peculiarly set apart to keep up the remembrance of his sufferings and death. There we see the loving and lovely *Jesus* laying down his life as a sacrifice and atonement for our sins; and shedding his precious blood to purchase for us a happiness large as our wishes, and lasting as eternity. We see the *Lord of Life* suffering a painful, an ignominious, an accursed *Death*; that by thus fulfilling the condition of the covenant of redemption, he might secure grace and glory, and every good thing, not to us only, but to an innumerable multitude, which no man can number, of all tongues, and kindreds, and nations, and languages. We behold the height and depth, the length and breadth of divine love to a perishing world: Of the *Father's* love in inflicting upon him such unparalleled sufferings, that we might not suffer; of his own love and condescension in cheerfully bearing them. We behold the *Son of Man* glorified, in bearing that load of wrath, without fainting under it, which would have sunk a whole world in irrecoverable misery. We behold *God* glorified in him, and all the divine perfections shining with united lustre, the justice of God sweetly combining with
his

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his mercy to punish our Surety, that we the offenders might be forgiven. From a deep and heart-affecting sense, that we, and all the children of Men, who obtain salvation, must be wholly indebted to that amazing transaction for obtaining it; we are made to say, "God forbid
 " that we should glory, save in the cross of
 " Christ. We will remember thy love more
 " than wine: We will rejoice in thy salvation;
 " and in the name of thee our God will we lift
 " up our banners: For thou, Lord, hast made
 " us glad through thy work, and we will triumph
 " in the works of thy hands. Thanks be unto
 " God for his unspeakable gift: And blessed be
 " he who hath come in the name of the Lord to
 " save us. Hosannah in the highest."

Ask your own hearts, *O Christians*, are you in any danger of remembering these things too much? And if you remember them at all, can you do it in any better method than that which infinite wisdom has prescribed?

Suppose a *Friend*, who had received a deadly wound in defending us from danger, should, when about to expire, present us with his picture, and recommend it to us with his dying breath, to keep it as a token and remembrance of his friendship and affection.---What would gratitude oblige us to do? Would we cast it into some by-corner out of sight? Would we suffer it to be sullied with dust? or buried under lumber, neglected and forgotten? Would we not rather hang it in our chief room? Would we not honour it, not only by care to preserve it from abuse, but by frequent looks, thereby to renew, and, if possible, to increase an affectionate remembrance how much we were indebted to our *departed Friend*?---

Can

Can we then pretend to honour our *Redeemer*, when we answer his care in providing and recommending his supper as a representative of his death, by a contrary care, in seeking pretences to lay it aside?

§ 3. The Lord's Supper is a visible badge of our Christian profession.-----Nature has taught mankind, and God himself has confirmed it, that every religion should have some solemn rite whereby it may be known to the very eye, from other religions. Circumcision, the passover, &c. under the *Mosaic* œconomy, were all intended, (not excluding other ends) to be signs between God and his people, *i. e.* rites whereby they might be distinguished from idolaters: And therefore a terrible threatening was levelled against the neglecters of these rites, *that soul must be cut off from his people*: He has put off the badge of my people, and therefore must not share in their privileges. All this being highly rational, *Christianity* has its distinguishing rites, as well as *Judaism* had.

Prayer, thanksgiving, and such-like holy exercises, are common to almost all religions, and observed by the Jew, the Turk, and the Heathen as well as the Christian.----Baptism we receive in our infancy, and without our own consent; and therefore it cannot be the principal criterion of our Christian profession.----But by partaking of the Lord's Supper, we distinguish ourselves from all who despise the gospel of Christ, and testify, in the most public manner, our regard to a crucified Saviour, our concern to keep up the remembrance of his death, and our resolutions to adhere to him and his cause, while by others he is disregarded and set at naught.

Our

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Our Lord well knowing how loath we are to undertake any thing difficult, although for the sake of him who was our best benefactor, would not burden us with any number of troublesome ceremonies: And therefore he only appointed this one ordinance, by which we should openly declare ourselves on Christ's side, and proclaim to the world our grateful, affectionate sense of his unparalleled love. Ought we not then to be frequent in thus openly *confessing Christ before men*, while too many are *ashamed of him and his words in this adulterous and perverse generation?*

The Lord's Supper is also intended as a seal and confirmation of the fulness and freedom of the offers of grace in the everlasting gospel. For as really as the minister offers the bread and wine to the communicants, so really God the Father offers Christ, the bread of life, to every one of us for the nourishment of our souls.—And are there any, whose faith is so lively and vigorous, that they seldom need the help of this ordinance to strengthen and increase it?

Is not the Lord's Supper an ordinance, in which God is often pleased to vouchsafe special communion with himself, and his Son Jesus Christ? Does it not greatly tend, through the divine blessing, to strengthen the communion of the mystical body of Christ, and to warm and enlarge our affection to all who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity? Does it not often prove meat indeed, and drink indeed to the fainting soul; a means to convey large measures of spiritual nourishment and growth in grace? Indeed suitable impressions of *Christ's* loving us, and giving himself for us a sacrifice and an offering to *God*, of a sweet smelling savour, are the great means by which holy
B dispositions

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dispositions are begun, carried on, and perfected in the soul. And what can tend more to awaken a lively sense of these things, than beholding the symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Christ? How many, who went to the Lord's table feeble and faint-hearted, have received such plenteous communications of light and life from the glorious Head of influences, that they have been made to renew their strength, to mount up with wings as eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint?

Who is there amongst us, whose need of the Lord's Supper, for one or other of the above purposes, does not frequently return? Has then God provided for us so rich an entertainment? Does he allow us often to regale ourselves with it; yea, even invite us in the most warm and earnest manner? And is it not a contempt of the goodness and condescension of God, and injuring our own spiritual interests, to neglect any opportunity of sitting down at the table of the Lord? "Our soul necessities," says the judicious Mr. Willison (*d*), "do call for frequency in partaking: For we are oft ready to forget Christ, and therefore we oft need this ordinance to bring him to our remembrance. We are oft subject to spiritual deadness, weakness of faith, and decays of grace; and therefore have frequent need of this ordinance for strength and quickening. There is ground to fear, that the unfrequent celebration and participation of this blessed feast, which Christ hath prepared for us, is an evil that many in
" this

(*d*) Sacramental Catechism, p. 86. and Preface, p. 9.

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" this church are chargeable with, and for which
 " the Lord may plead a controversy with us.
 " How can we expect but he will depart from
 " us, when we stand at such a distance from
 " him, and come so seldom near him in the me-
 " thod he hath appointed? Can we look for the
 " smiles of Christ's countenance, when we live
 " so much in the neglect of his dying words? Is
 " it any wonder our hearts are so hard, when
 " we are so seldom applying the blood of Christ
 " for softening them; or that our graces be so
 " weak and withered, when we so little use the
 " means for strengthening and cherishing them?
 " Is not the frequent use of this ordinance, in
 " the way Christ hath appointed, an excellent
 " help to soften our hearts, renew our repent-
 " ance, strengthen our faith, inflame our love,
 " increase our thankfulness, animate our resolu-
 " tions against sin, and encourage us to holy
 " duties; and shall we willingly neglect it? It
 " is no wonder that we complain we miss what
 " we aim at and expect in this ordinance, when
 " we are so little sensible of former neglects. It
 " is a sad sign our receiving of the sacrament is
 " not right, when it leaves not in us earnest
 " breathings for the like opportunity. It is im-
 " possible for us to meet with Christ, and taste
 " of his sweetness and fulness in this ordinance,
 " and not long for another meeting." Thus far
 Mr. Willison. Many excellent reflections to the
 same purpose may be found in Charnock's *Works*,
vol. II. p. 758,---768. which those who have the
 book would do well to peruse.

§ 4. The two preceding paragraphs abun-
 dantly prove, that if frequent communicating
 cannot be urged as absolutely necessary, it may

safely be recommended as highly expedient and beneficial. But, perhaps, upon inquiry we shall find in Scripture an express injunction of frequency; nay, of a precise degree of frequency in partaking of the Lord's Supper. For, that a prince should require a tribute to be paid him by every one of his subjects, and yet never express what sum should be paid, and at what time, is incredible. In like manner, I cannot easily bring myself to believe, that our Lord should require his church, to the end of the world, to eat bread, and drink wine in commemoration of his death, without specifying how often he would have it done.---The Jews, though they understood not the utmost signification of the *Paschal* rite, yet had full directions how often, and in what day they were to sacrifice and eat the lamb. If then the word of God has assigned no precise time for partaking of the Lord's Supper, will it not follow, that the gospel is more obscure than the law; and that our Lord, when he took the vail from off Moses's face, covered with a thicker vail his own?

1 Cor. xi. 26. bids fair for containing such a special direction. *As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come.* Dr. Bury observes (e), that the words, *this bread, and this cup*, must refer to *some particular bread and cup*, well known among the Jews, of which, as often as they eat and drank, they were bound to remember the sufferings of Christ: That accordingly (if we may credit Buxtorf and Leo Modena) it was usual at their feasts, for the master of the house, to take a loaf of bread, and

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(e) Constant Communicant, p. 33.

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bless and break it, and give to each person about the bigness of an olive; and if there were three or more eating together, to take a glass from off the table, and bless it also, and give to each of the guests a little of the wine in the glass.—If these remarks be well founded, it will follow, that if the Jews knew how often they had such festivals, that was direction sufficient how often to partake of the Lord's Supper.

But I mention this, rather as a subject of inquiry, than an hypothesis with which I am fully satisfied. There are many natural and obvious objections against it, which I do not think that ingenious writer has removed.

Dr. Wettenhall has offered another conjecture (f), that a certain determinate frequency in communicating is enjoined in these words, 1 Cor. xi. 25. *This do ye, as oft as ye drink, in remembrance of me.* He observes, that the particle *it* is not in the original, and is not supplied in the vulgar Latin, the Syriac, or any of the old versions. He then goes on to argue thus: "If with our own, and most modern translations, we supply the particle *it*, and thereby understand the cup in the sacrament, this makes the command to signify just nothing. For, what sense is there in this form of speech, *Drink this cup, as oft as ye drink it*? Or, if we repeat the noun, instead of using the pronoun, *Drink this cup in remembrance of me, as often as ye drink this cup in remembrance of me.* We must therefore conclude, that the verb *pinete*, stands here absolutely, or by itself. And probably it is used in the *Hellenistical* sense of the word for
"feasting

“ feasting or banqueting, and so the text will
 “ run thus, *Do this in remembrance of me, as often*
 “ *as you feast, or, on all your holy feasts.* Now,
 “ for as much as every Lord’s Day was, even
 “ when this epistle was writ, already among the
 “ Christians a holy feast, therefore the com-
 “ mand will come to thus much, *Do this, or ce-*
 “ *lebrate my supper every Lord’s Day at least.* At
 “ least, I said, for other holy feasts they might
 “ have besides the Lord’s Day, but this most
 “ surely they all had. See 2 Pet. ii. 13. Jude
 “ ver. 12. compared with 1 Cor. xi. 20, 21.
 “ The plain meaning then of the command, *This*
 “ *do, as oft as ye drink, in remembrance of me,* is,
 “ I know that you, my disciples, will keep every
 “ first day of the week as a holy feast, with joy
 “ and gladness, in memory of my resurrection;
 “ and I intend so to order it. Now, see that
 “ every such day you remember my sufferings
 “ too, as well as my resurrection.”

These are the only passages that look like an
 injunction of any precise degree of frequency in
 partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Mr. Charnock
 has indeed cited one from the Old Testament for
 the same purpose. “ The practice, says he (g),
 “ of weekly communicating perhaps was ground-
 “ ed on Ezek. xliii. 27. *And it shall be upon the*
 “ *eighth day, and so forward, the priest shall make*
 “ *your burnt-offerings upon the altar, and your peace-*
 “ *offerings, and I will accept you, saith the Lord.*
 “ A prophecy of gospel times, and the cessation
 “ of the ceremonial law of daily sacrifices: By
 “ burnt-offerings being meant the Lord’s Sup-
 “ per

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“ per, the remembrance of the great burnt-offering whereby our peace was made: And by “ peace-offerings, prayer and thanksgiving, which “ are called sacrifices, Heb. xiii. 15. And on “ the Lord’s Day, being the eighth day, following upon the seventh, the Jewish Sabbath.” But I much doubt if the primitive Christians, fond as some of them were of allegorizing and mystical interpretations, ever carried their regard for these to the ridiculous height of building upon them a practice of such importance as weekly communicating. It is more probable their practice was founded on a New Testament precept, plain to them, though to us dark and obscure.

§ 5. But that obscurity will be no plea for our seldom communicating. For whatever difficulty there may be in finding an express precept, the *Apostolical Example*, which is as binding as a precept, is so clear and obvious, that he who runs may read it. And to me it seems something strange, that those who suppose the apostolical practice sufficient to change the *Sabbath* from that day on which God, in the *fourth Commandment*, had enjoined it to be kept, should pay so small regard to it in this instance, where it alters no command moral or positive, but serves to clear up a material circumstance in observing a precept which otherwise might seem indeterminate.---Let us therefore take a survey of such passages of Scripture as throw any light on this important subject.

§ 6. The sacrament was instituted by our Lord that night in which he was betrayed. From this circumstance, allow me to remark, that it may lawfully be dispensed on other days, as well as the Sabbath.

§ 7. Less

§ 7. Less than a week after, even the very day of our Lord's resurrection, being the first day of the week, and the *Christian Sabbath*, the Lord's Supper is again dispensed by Jesus himself (*b*). For that day, while two of the disciples are walking together to *Emmaus*, Jesus comes up with them, and takes occasion, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, to expound to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. But though this heavenly preacher speaks to them as never man spoke, still they were ignorant it was he: fond, however, of his company, they constrained him to abide with them, as the day was far spent. And it came to pass, says Luke (*i*), as he sat at meat with them, he took bread and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them: and their eyes were opened, and they knew him. Jesus could have discovered himself to them how and when he pleased. Sure then, he who does nothing in vain had some wise reason for chusing to do it in these, rather than in other circumstances. And what reason so probable, as to put a distinguishing respect on the sacrament of the supper, by making it the first means of manifesting himself to these disciples? Why else were the *disciples* so careful to report this circumstance? And why was the *evangelist* (*j*) so punctual to record, that they reported not only the thing, but the manner, in what manner he was known to them by the breaking of the bread? Must then our Lord's chusing this manner of manifesting himself to them preferably to all others; must the care of the *disciples* in reporting this manner; and must the care of the

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(*b*) Luke xxiv. 13, compared with ver. 1.

(*i*) Luke xxiv. 30, 31. (*j*) Ibid. ver. 35.

evangelist in recording both the one and the other: must all this, I say, be imputed to mere chance? Did they account this an *insignificant circumstance*, though they appear to lay *particular stress* upon it? And though they seem to *honour* it, did they intend that we should pass it by without the *least regard*? I know not how a rational answer can be given to these questions by such who interpret the passage of common bread. Cartwright betakes himself to a strange shift. *It was not*, says he, *the breaking of bread itself, by which Jesus was known to his disciples, but something peculiar in his manner of asking a blessing before meat.* Is not this commentary a plainly contradicting the text? And can that cause be a good one, which reduces so able a *critic* to so poor an evasion?

The expressions used by *Luke* in this passage (*k*), seem so parallel to his expressions when recording the original institution of the sacrament (*l*), that I am persuaded few would have mistaken his meaning, had not the church of *Rome* misapplied this passage, to prove from the example of our *Lord*, that it is sufficient to distribute the *bread* in the sacrament without the *wine*.—But would it not have been easy to have confuted that sophism, by observing, that *eating of bread*, is a phrase for the whole of a feast, and therefore the mention of it does not exclude other ingredients of a feast. Besides, the *papists* themselves allow, that, though the *bread* may be distributed without the *wine*, it is never to be *consecrated* apart. But here is no mention even of the consecration of the *wine*. If then the *evangelist's* silence is no proof that the *wine* was not consecrated,

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(*k*) Luke xxiv. ver. 30.(*l*) Ibid. xxii. 19

crated, it is as little proof that it was not distributed.

From this passage I remark, (1.) That the Lord's Supper was the first religious institution, in which our Lord, after his resurrection, manifested himself to his disciples. (2.) That this ordinance was twice dispensed by Jesus himself in the space of a week. (3.) The evangelist's remarking, that it was dispensed to the two disciples the first day of the week, seems an intimation, that our Lord intended it should be a principal part of the sanctification of the *Christian Sabbath*.

§ 8. Acts ii. 42. we are told of Peter's *converts*, that they *continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer*. The words *esan proskarterountes*, which we render *continued stedfastly*, properly denote *constancy*, or *perseverance in an exercise*, or *waiting continually upon any thing*, as appears from the use of the same word, Acts i. 14. vi. 4. viii. 13. and x. 7. Rom. xii. 12. and xiii. 6. And therefore whatever is meant by *breaking of bread*, it is plain they were as constant in that, as in attending on the apostle's doctrine, and public prayer. All then we have to enquire is, if the expression relates to the Lord's Supper, or to a common meal.

Dr. Whitby explains it of the latter, in his notes on this passage. "I see, says he, no necessity to think these words relate to the receiving of the sacrament, for the phrase of *the breaking of bread* is used by the evangelists, Matth. xv. 36. and Mark viii. 19, 20. when they relate Christ's miraculous feeding the multitude."

But

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But in answer to this, I would observe, (1.) That the argument does not require us to maintain, that *breaking of bread* must always relate to the sacrament. It is enough to our purpose, if the expression is capable of that sense, and if the scope of this passage makes it necessary here. (2.) That the phrase is capable of being understood of the sacrament is universally allowed; and Dr. Whitby himself explains it of the sacrament, Acts xx. 7, 11. It is used by Luke eight times (*m*), and by Paul thrice (*n*); and in all these passages, except Acts xxvii. 35. it is almost certain it relates to the Lord's Supper: and even that passage is applied by Tertullian (*o*) to that ordinance. Ignatius, a writer in the apostolic times, uses the same phrase of *breaking of bread*, where he is plainly speaking of the Lord's Supper (*p*). (3.) The other exercises mentioned here, in conjunction with *breaking of bread*, are all of them religious exercises, attendance on the apostle's doctrine, fellowship, prayer. What then hath breaking of common bread to do in such company? It adds strength to this argument, that Justin Martyr (*q*) and Tertullian (*r*) mention the Lord's Supper, and the other exercises of which Luke here speaks, as stated exercises of the worshipping assemblies of Christians. (4.) The Syriac version of the New Testament, which is the best and oldest extant, and probably was composed in the apostolic times, if not by the apostles themselves, as

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(*m*) Luke xxii. 19. and xxiv. 30, 35. Acts ii. 42, 46. Acts xx. 7, 11. and xxvii. 35. (*n*) 1 Cor. x. 16. and xi. 24. (*o*) Tertul. de Orat. cap. xxiv. (*p*) Ad Ephes. cap. xx. p. 19. (*q*) Justin Martyr Apol. ii. p. 98. (*r*) Tertullian Apol. cap. xxxix.

Mr. Jones has strongly shewn, in his excellent book on the *canon*; that version, I say, interprets breaking of bread of the Eucharist: and most of the fathers were of the same opinion (s). -- From all this we may infer, that, in the public assemblies of the primitive Christians, breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ, was as stated an exercise as attending on the apostle's doctrine, joining in prayer together, or communicating to the necessities of their poor brethren.

§ 9. It is said of the same persons, Acts ii. 46. *And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread in a house, did participate the food with gladness and singleness of heart.*

Suppose we were to retain the common translation, *breaking of bread from house to house*, that would be no conclusive argument, that the Lord's supper is not intended: for the multitude of the faithful might render it inconvenient for all to partake of the sacrament in one house, and on that account, it might have been dispensed successively in different houses.

But our translation is plainly faulty, and the cause of the mistake is easily traced out: *Kath' emeran*, in the first clause of the verse, signifies *daily*, or *from day to day*: and hence it was imagined, *kat' oikon* must signify, *in every house*, or *from house to house*: whereas it is evident, from the use of the preposition *kata*, when applied to place, that it denotes some precise determinate place. See Luke viii. 39. x. 32, 33. xv. 14. and xxiii. 5. Acts ix. 42. xi. 1. xiii. 1. and xvi. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 19. Col. iv. 15. Philem. ver. 2. and

(s) Vide Suiceri Thes. tom. ii. p. 105. And Obs. Sac. p. 130.

and never relates to more places than one, except the substantive to which it is joined be in the plural number, as Luke xiii 22. Acts v. 15. viii. 1, 3. and xx. 20. or be connected with an adjective denoting universality, as Acts xv. 36. Accordingly Scaliger observes, that in an old Roman inscription, *Tamian ton kata polin*, does not signify *the treasurer of every town*, or *the treasurer from town to town*, but *the treasurer of the town*, viz. Rome. To confirm these remarks, I might observe, that neither the Arabic nor Syriac version renders *kat' oikon*, *from house to house*, but only *at home*, or *in a house*.

The temple being a house of prayer for all nations, that part of worship the disciples were at liberty to perform there, and accordingly *they continued daily with one accord in the temple*. But they could not dispense the sacrament there, without drawing upon themselves certain destruction. They were therefore under a necessity of holding private conventicles for that purpose, in places where they might be in less danger of disturbance.

Both Jews and Profelytes were careful to provide a large upper room, in their houses for religious exercises. What more probable, than that the primitive Christians having performed their daily devotions in the temple, at the hour of prayer, should then repair to a large upper room to partake of the Lord's supper, perhaps that very upper room in which our Lord instituted the sacrament, Mark xiv. 15, 22. and where the eleven continued, with Mary, in prayer and supplication, Acts i. 13, 14 (†). This is the more likely

(†) Vide Jos. Mede, in Operibus, p. 322. Gregor. in Obser. Sacr. cap. iii. & Personium in Lectionibus ad Actus Apostolicos, p. 31.

from what we are told, Acts v. 42. *Daily in the temple and in a house*, (for so it should be rendered) *they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ*. In the temple, to convert infidels; in the private house, to strengthen and confirm believers.

From this passage, it is probable, that the church at Jerusalem received the Lord's Supper every Day.

§ 10. The next passage, to our purpose, is Acts xx. 7. *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, &c.*

From this passage it is plain, (1.) That it was the custom of the first Christians to keep the Lord's day holy, or as a day appointed for religious worship, and accordingly to hold their public solemn assemblies on that day. St. Paul did not call them together as he did the elders of the church, ver. 17. but the disciples were themselves *sunegmenoi* met in their assembly. The context informs, that Paul tarried at Troas seven days. Though he was hasting to Jerusalem, he did not, as he easily might have done, summon an *extraordinary assembly* on any of these days, but contented himself with more private labours; and chose rather to delay his journey till the return of the first day of the week, when he was sure of a *full assembly* of Christians. (2.) The great design of their meeting was *to break bread*, i. e. to celebrate the Lord's Supper. This was with them a constant branch of the sanctification of the *Sabbath*: and perhaps their thus remembering the death of Christ on that day, is none of the least causes of its being termed *the Lord's day*. It adds probability to this, that Chrysostom (u) terms the

(u) Chrysost. Hom. v. de Resur.

FREQUENT COMMUNICATING. 23

the Sabbath *the day of bread*. Shall we then, on the Lord's day, omit an exercise from which it principally derives so honourable a name?

§ 11. That in all church meetings the Lord's Supper was dispensed, is further evident from 1 Cor. xi. 20, 21. The apostle had said a little before, that their meeting together was not for the better, but for the worse: this he proves from their behaving themselves so in these meetings, that they neither did nor could eat the Lord's Supper as became that holy institution. *When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper*, i. e. it is not so to do it as that sacred action ought to be performed. Now, this argument evidently supposes, that whenever they assembled together, they came to eat the Lord's Supper; for otherwise their coming together, so as not to eat the Lord's Supper, would be no proof that their coming together was for the worse. Had the apostle charged the Corinthians, as guilty in some particular meetings in which the Lord's Supper was immediately concerned, we had then understood, that it was not a constant exercise in their worshipping assemblies: but on the contrary he charges them with profaning the Lord's supper in all their meetings: and what is termed *coming together*, ver. 17. *coming to the church*, ver. 18. *coming to one place*, ver. 19. is termed *coming together to eat*, ver. 33 (w). Which shews, that whenever the

(w) *Coming together to eat* is an expression as liable to be perverted by the Papists, for excluding the laity from the cup, as Luke xxiv. 30. and Acts ii. 42. But those, to ward off that silly argument, have ever said that the passage has no relation to the sacrament. Why then need they say so in these other instances?

the Christians met together in one place for religious exercises, eating of bread was a part of their employment.

SECTION II.

WE have, in the preceding section, demonstrated, from the sacred oracles, that, in the days of the apostles, dispensing the sacrament was as stated an exercise in the meetings of the faithful, as Prayer, hearing the word, or collecting for the supply of their needy brethren; and that accordingly in the church at Jerusalem, they had daily communions, and in every church communions at least once a-week. Let us next view how this pattern has been regarded or slighted in after-ages, and with what success.

How the first ages of the church conducted themselves in this matter, is well known to all in the least conversant with church history: so that I need only refer such to a few of the many who have writ on this subject (x), and save myself the trouble of saying any thing about it. But, for the sake of my unlearned readers, I shall give a short abridgment of what may be found more at large in these writers.

The practice of those, who lived in the very infancy of the church, must deserve peculiar regard. Their thorough acquaintance with the style in which the New Testament was writ, the customs

(x) Calvini Inst. lib. iv. cap. 17. § 44, — 46. Buddei Inst. Theol. Dogm. lib. v. cap. 1 § 19. Dr. Cave's primitive Christianity, Part I. cap. 11. Sir Peter King on the church, Part II. chap. 7. § 6. Waterland on the eucharist, chap. xiv.

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customs to which it alludes, and with many other peculiarities which are now almost buried in obscurity; but especially their conversing with the apostles, or their immediate disciples, must give them great advantages for understanding the religion of Jesus. And as many of them sealed their doctrine with their blood, we cannot reasonably entertain the least suspicion, that they would dare knowingly to alter the least circumstance in the last, the dying command of their dear Master.

§ 2. Pliny, in his epistle to the emperor Trajan (b), wrote about the year of Christ 110, which was only six years after the death of the evangelist St. John, acquaints the emperor, that he had found nothing to alledge against the Christians, but their obstinacy in their superstition: and that it was their custom to meet together on a set day before it was light, and to sing a hymn to Christ as God, and to bind themselves by the sacrament, that they would commit no wickedness.

Justin Martyr, who wrote, A. D. 155, is another witness (c). On the day, says he, that is called Sunday, all the Christians meet together, because that is the day of our Saviour's resurrection, and then we have read to us the writings of the prophets and apostles. This done, the president makes a speech, exhorting the people to practise what they have heard. Then we all join in prayer: then bread, wine, and water are brought forth, and the president having again
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poured

(b) Plin. Ep. lib. 10. ep. 97. *Seque sacramento obstringere, &c.* (c) Justin Martyr, Apol. ii. p. 98. *de tou eliou legomene emera, &c.*

poured out prayers and praises to God, there is a distribution and communication made of the sacramental elements. Last of all, those that are willing and able contribute what they think fit for the relief of the indigent.---How exactly does this account of the worship of the primitive church tally with that of St. Luke, Acts ii. 42?

Tertullian, who lived about A. D. 200 (*d*), takes notice of some, who declined receiving the sacrament on the stationary days (Wednesdays and Fridays) for fear of breaking their fast; and blames them for this as a foolish scruple.---This passage not only proves that he thought it a duty incumbent on the faithful to communicate as often as possible, but that it was then a common practice, to communicate on other days as well as Sundays.

Minutius Felix, who flourished A. D. 230, speaks of the Christians assembling to eat on a solemn day (*e*).

Cyprian (A. D. 250.) tells us, that *daily communions* were the common practice of his time (*f*). And Fortunatus, his cotemporary, made use of the fourth petition of the Lord's prayer as an argument for communicating daily.

Victorinus Petavionensis (A. D. 290,) tells us, that it was usual on the Lord's day to receive the sacrament (*g*).

Basil,

(*d*) Tertullian de Orat. cap. xiv. p. 136. (*e*) Epistolas die Solenni cœunt. Min. Fel. p. 39. (*f*) Cyprian de Orat. Domin. p. 209, 210. ed. Bened. Eucharistiam quotidie ad cibum salutis accipimus, &c. (*g*) Vict. Petav. de Fabric. Mundi ap. Cave, p. 103. Die dominico cum gratiarum actione ad panem examus.

FREQUENT COMMUNICATING. 27

Basil, about the year 372, recommends communicating *every day*; and informs us, that it was the practice of the church of Cæsarea, where he was, to celebrate the sacrament four times a-week, viz. on Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday (*b*).

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, who was cotemporary with Basil, or whoever is author of the tract, in his works, *de Sacramentis*, justly blames the infrequent use of the sacrament among the Greeks, where some communicated only once a year; and seems to intimate that *daily communions* were in use at Milan (*i*).

St. Hierom tells us, that they were likewise kept up in his time, (*i. e.* about the year 390) in the churches of Spain, and at Rome (*j*).

Augustin (about the year 410,) tells us, that the Eucharist was received by many on Saturday, as well as the Lord's day, *every week*; and by some even *daily* (*k*).

§ 3. These passages are more than sufficient to prove, that during the *first four centuries*, the sacrament of the Lord's supper was dispensed even oftener than once a-week, and that it was a constant branch of the sanctification of the Sabbath. Let us next shew how it came to be otherwise, and what was the consequence.

The learned Dr. Waterland observes, that during the *first three centuries*, we meet with no canons made to enforce frequent communion; scarce so much as exhortations to it, or any complaints of neglect in that article, which is an ar-

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gument

(*b*) Basil, ep. 289. (*i*) Ambros. de sacram. lib. v. cap. 4. p. 449. (*j*) Hieronym. ep. 52. ad Lucin.
 (*k*) Augustin. ep. 118. ad Januar.

gument, that Christians in those times were not tardy in that respect, but rather forward and pressing, under a high notion of the privilege and comfort of partaking of the holy communion (1). Tertullian, who lived in the close of the second century, observes, as I remarked in the former paragraph, that there were some who scrupled to communicate Wednesdays and Fridays. But even that shews, they had no scruple at communicating every Lord's day.

But in the *fourth century*, defection from the primitive purity of the church began more and more to appear. The most probable cause, I can assign for this, is, that till then the religion of Christ being persecuted, few professed it who had not felt the power of it on their hearts. But soon after, Christianity becoming the established religion of the Roman empire, a greater number of hypocrites, from views of worldly interest, intermingled themselves with the true disciples of Christ: and in a century or two more, this *little leaven leavened the whole lump*.

Such nominal Christians could have no just sense of the use and benefit of the Lord's supper, and the obligations to frequent it. Having only a form of godliness, without the power of it, it is no wonder that the frequent return of religious exercises should be uneasy and disagreeable to them. Their example would soon be followed by lukewarm Christians, *who had fallen from their first love*.

About the year 324, it was decreed at a council held at Elibiris in Spain, that no offerings should be received from such as did not receive the

(1) Waterland on the Eucharist, chap. xiv.

FREQUENT COMMUNICATING. 29

the Lord's supper (*m*): which shews, that some who called themselves Christians, were beginning to neglect the dying command of their professed Lord.

About the year 341, a council at Antioch decreed, that all who came to church and heard the scriptures read, but afterwards joined not in prayer and receiving the sacrament, should be cast out of the church, till such time as they gave public proof of their repentance (*n*).

Towards *the close of the fourth century*, men grew more and more cold and indifferent about the Lord's supper; so that the eloquent Chrysostom complains, "In vain stand we at the altar, none care to receive (*o*)."
And in another place, after he had represented the danger of unworthy receiving, he adds, "I speak not this to deter you from coming, but from coming carelessly; for as there is danger in coming carelessly, so there is famine and death in the not partaking at all. This table is, as it were, the sinews of our soul, the girding up of the mind, the support of our confidence, our hope, our health, our light, our life (*p*)."

The first council of Toledo, in the year 400, enacted, That those who were observed never to come to the communion, should be admonished; and if they did not reform, obliged to submit to penance: and that such of the clergy as came not to the daily prayers and communion should be deposed, if they did not reform after admonition (*q*).

From

(*m*) Concil. Illiberit. can. xxviii. (*n*) Concil. Antioch. can. ii. (*o*) Chrysost. Hom. iii. in Ephes.
(*p*) Chrysost. in 1 Cor. x. Hom. xxv. (*q*) Concil. Tol. i. can. v. xiii.

From this decree it is plain, that though the sacrament was daily dispensed to such as were willing to receive, yet, that the neglect of that ordinance had begun to infect the clergy as well as the people. Yet hitherto this was a fault, with which only particular persons were chargeable, and warmly testified against, not only by the most eminent fathers, but by the public canons of the church.

But about the year 410, St. Augustine being consulted, whether it was best to communicate daily, or on such particular days when we were best prepared, gave this answer, "Neither he who communicates daily, nor he who does not, really dishonours the Lord's body and blood, while both contend only in a different way, who shall do most honour to the blessed sacrament. For neither did Zaccheus and the centurion strive together, or one prefer himself before the other, when the former gladly received our Lord into his house, and the latter said, *I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof*. Both did honour to our Saviour, though in contrary ways, and both found mercy. So here, one out of reverence dares not partake every day; another from the same reverence dares not omit it a single day. All is well, so long as in either case the ordinance is not condemned (r)." It is probable this decision gave the first rise to the notion, that men might pay their reverence to the sacrament by turning their back upon it; and that our Lord's command, *Do this in remembrance of me*, was as much honoured by forbearing his table as by frequenting

(r) Augustin. ep. cxviii. ad Januar.

FREQUENT COMMUNICATING. 31

quenting it. And indeed it is strange, that even the name of St. Augustine could make such a notion blindly followed. However, we must observe, as some excuse for that worthy *Father*, that the question proposed to him was, Shall a man communicate every day? But had the question been, Is communicating *once or thrice a year* sufficient? he, no doubt, would have answered, No; and recommended weekly communions, as *Gennadius* did, in the close of the same century, tho' he would give no decision as to daily communions (s). I might add, it is plain, from *Socrates*' and *Sozomenes*' church histories (t), that *weekly communions* were generally kept up till the year 450. *Socrates*, however, tells us of two exceptions. "Whereas, says he, all churches through
 " the world, on the Sabbath day, in *every revolution of the week*, celebrate the mysteries, they
 " of Alexandria, and they of Rome, on a certain ancient tradition, have refused to do it." Probably the church of Rome was principal, that of Alexandria only accessory, in this peculiarity: For Alexandria drawing considerable sums of money from Rome, for the corn with which she furnished that city, might the easier be led to imitate the Roman customs: However others too soon followed their pattern. We see then *to what we owe the neglect of weekly communions, even to the pretended traditions of the church of Rome.*

At length communicating weekly, or even monthly, begins to appear burdensome. The greatest part received the sacrament only three times

(s) *Gennadius* inter August. op. tom. viii. app. p. 78. Ed. Bened. (t) *Socratis*, lib. v. cap. 24. & *Sozomen.* lib. vii cap. 19.

times a-year, and some not so often. This occasioned the council of Agde or Agatha in Languedoc, met in the year 506, to decree, that none should be esteemed good Christians who did not communicate at least at the *three* great festivals, Christmas, Easter, and Whitsunday (*u*); and accordingly, from that time forward, those of the church of Rome esteemed themselves, in so far good enough Christians, if they communicated thrice a year, and that it was presumption to receive oftener (*v*). But in the Greek church, which was more distant from the fountain of corruption, it was usual to communicate weekly, even so low as the *seventh* century; and such as neglected *three Weeks* together were excommunicated (*w*). And in the *eighth Century*, Bede gave it as his opinion, that daily communions would be highly salutary to Christians *. But that opinion, not being very consistent with the doctrine of transubstantiation, which now began to be broached in the church, met with but small regard; so that in a short time it became the general practice to communicate only once a-year, at Easter; and this the council of Trent seem to account sufficient (*x*).

It was then the church of Rome which introduced seldom communicating; for which, as for all their *Innovations*, they pretended an *ancient Tradition*; and by which they alledged mens reverence for that ordinance would be heightened: And indeed so it was, till *Veneration* gradually increasing

(*u*) Concil Agath. Can. xviii. (*v*) Bedæ, ep. ad Egbert, p. 311. (*w*) Theodor. Penitent. p. 46.
 * Vide Let. v. (*x*) Concil. Trid. Sess. 13. Can. 9.

creasing, at length produced *Adoration*, and the blasphemous absurdity of a *Waver God*. A striking instance how dangerous it is for Christians to pretend to secure reverence to the institutions of their *Lord*, by methods different from those which he himself has appointed; and that it is our only safety to adhere to the plan delivered us in the writings and practice of those who were under the infallible guidance of the *Spirit*, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left. If we do otherwise, how prudent soever our measures may seem, and however pious our intentions may really be, we have in so far rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom can there be in us?

§ 4. The reader may possibly now expect an account what has been the practice of the purest reformed churches in this matter: But my small acquaintance with books, which can throw light on this inquiry, permits me to say but little on this head.

In Bohemia the holy supper is usually celebrated four times a-year. They dispense it oftener when the need of the faithful requires it; but thus often they enjoin it to be dispensed for the sake of uniformity (y).

A national synod of the Protestants in France, met at Charenton 1664, give it as their judgment, "That, though the Lord's Supper is dispensed in their church only four times a-year, greater frequency would be desirable, the reverence requisite at the Lord's Table being preserved, that so Saints might increase in faith,
 E " through

(y) Account of the church order and discipline in the unity of the brethren of Bohemia, chap. iii. § 4.

“ through frequent partaking of the sacrament,
 “ as the primitive church did (z).

The Lutherans have a communion every Sunday and Holiday throughout the year (a). And though the number of communicants is often but small (b), yet it is usual among them to communicate three or four times a year (c).

The church of England enjoins, that “ in
 “ every parish church and chapel, where sacra-
 “ ments are to be administered within this realm,
 “ the holy communion shall be ministered by the
 “ parson, vicar, or minister, so often, and at such
 “ times, as every parishioner may communicate at
 “ least *thrice* in the year (d).” It is well known, that many of the clergy in that church have recommended, and that many of the well-disposed among their laity practise, a much greater frequency.----This has given occasion to some, to asperse the Synod of Glasgow’s overture, as paving the way to Episcopacy. But is it not abundantly consistent with the most rigid Presbyterian principles, to take a lesson from our sister church, where her practice approaches nearer the Scripture standard than ours? Is her observing an institution of Christ any reason for our neglecting it? The purest church on earth may learn something from churches less pure. And whatever some do, I shall never esteem it a mark of purity, to say to others, *Stand by, come not near me, for I am holier than thou.* The more
 we

(z) La Discipline des Eglises Reformes de France, chap. xii. § 14. (a) Johnson’s unbloody Sacrifice, Part II. p. 151. (b) Calvoer de tit. ecl. t. i. p. 758. (c) Buddei Inst. Theol. Dogm. lib. v. cap. i. § 19. (d) Canon xxi. of the Province of Canterbury.

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we have of true religion, the more will we have of a humble, teachable disposition, and a willingness to be instructed, even by our weaker brethren. I wish 1 Cor. xii. 21. & *seq.* were more considered. Progress in reformation can never be expected, when the best things are rejected that other churches practise, under pretence of guarding against their corruptions. I cannot but observe, that Cartwright (*e*) and Calderwood (*f*) charged the church of England with too seldom communicating. So different was the opinion of these great and good men, from that which now prevails. And I am well informed, that a great part of those who were ejected for non-conformity in Charles II's time, dispensed the sacrament *monthly*. I have now in my custody, manuscript Memoirs of a private Christian, who lived in the time of the civil wars in England, who, I find, received the sacrament, with great profit, the *first Lord's Day* of every *month*, at the meeting where Mr. Ash, a member of the Westminster assembly, and Mr. Robrough, one of their scribes, were ministers: And that if any incident prevented the dispensing the sacrament the first Sabbath of the month, it was done, if possible, the Sabbath next following (*g*).

The churches in New England have no times universally stated for their celebration of the Eucharist. Some have it once in *four weeks*, some in *six*, some in *eight*: Some the first Lord's Day

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in

(*e*) Cartwright's Reply to Whitgift, p. 117.

(*f*) Calderwood's Altare Damascenum. (*g*) The manuscript is intitled, *The growth of a Christian*, and was lent me by Mr. William Hog, merchant in Edinburgh.

in every Kalendar month, and some the last. And the pastors reserve to themselves a liberty of altering the times as they judge fit upon emergencies. The pastor gives notice a week before-hand, that the Lord's Supper is to be dispensed. In most places there are held private meetings of Christians on some day of the week preparatory to the communion: And it is a frequent thing for the pastor to be present at some or other of them; or else, perhaps, to hold a public lecture (*b*).

From the form of dispensing the sacraments, composed by Calvin for the use of the church of Geneva (*i*), it appears, that the Lord's Day preceding, intimation was made to the people, that they might prepare for that holy ordinance; and that strangers, who inclined to communicate, might converse with the minister. On the Sacrament Day, the minister, at the end of the sermon, explained the design of that ordinance, and how it ought to be received: Or, if he judged it necessary, spent his whole sermon on that subject. How often in the year the sacrament was dispensed, is not there mentioned; but from Calvin's zeal to revive even weekly communicating, it is probable it was at least once a month: especially as Calvin approved the Book of common Order of the English church at Geneva, where Knox was minister; which Book takes notice, that the Lord's Supper was commonly used by them once a month, so oft as the congregation think expedient (*k*).

I had

(*b*) Cotton Mather's Account of the Discipline in the Churches in New England, p. 95, 96. (*i*) Apud Calvini Tract. Theolog. p. 39, 40. (*k*) Book of common Order, &c. Preamble to chap. x.

FREQUENT COMMUNICATING. 37

I had almost forgot to take notice, that the Greek church celebrate the sacrament every Sunday, and solemn *Festival*, in their great churches, and that the laity are obliged to receive it *four times* a year (*m*).

§ 5. I now go on to represent the practice of our own church in her best times.

Before the reformation, in the year 1558, the few godly preachers that were in the kingdom, were forced by persecution (like the primitive Christians, Acts ii. 46.) to teach God's word, and administer the sacrament in the fields, or in private houses (*n*): so that their situation did not admit of stated times for communicating.

The 29th of April 1560, the great council of Scotland, laid their orders upon six ministers, whereof Mr. John Knox was one, to commit to writing their judgment touching the reformation of religion. Upon this they drew up the first book of discipline, and presented it to the great council, May 20th, 1560. Mr. Knox warmly urged, that it should be publicly approved. And though he could not obtain this, yet, as private men, the whole body of the first *Reformers* signed it, the 17th January, 1561, acknowledging it to be good, and according to God's word, and promising to set it forward to the uttermost of their power. The general assemblies, July 30th, 1562, December 25th, 1562, and December 25th, 1563, seem to consider it as binding on the church.

Their opinion touching the times of dispensing the Lord's Supper, they give in these words (*o*),

“ Four

(*m*) Smith's Account of the Greek church. (*n*) Mr. Wodrow's Manuscript of Mr. Row's History, p. 5.

(*o*) First Book of Discipline, chap. xi. § 5. of Dunlop's edition.

" Four times in the year we think sufficient to
 " the administration of the Lord's Table, which
 " we desire to be distincted, that the supersti-
 " tions of times may be avoided so far as may
 " be; for your honours are not ignorant how
 " superstitiously the people run to that action at
 " Pasche, even as if that time gave virtue to the
 " sacrament; and how the rest of the whole year
 " they are careless and negligent, as if it apper-
 " tained not unto them, but at that time only.
 " We think therefore most expedient, that the
 " first Sunday of March be appointed for one
 " time to that service: the first Sunday of June
 " for another; the first Sunday of September for
 " the third; and the first Sunday of December
 " for the fourth. We do not deny, but any se-
 " veral kirk, for reasonable causes, may change
 " the time, and may minister oftener; but we
 " study to repress superstition." An injunction
 follows to catechise, especially such whose know-
 ledge was suspected, before the administration of
 the sacrament. But there is not the least hint
 of week-day's sermons before or after the com-
 munion.

At the fourth general assembly, which was
 holden at Edinburgh, December 25th, 1562, and
 of which Mr. John Knox was moderator, it was
 concluded, " That an uniform order should be
 " kept in the administration of the sacraments,
 " solemnization of marriage, and burial of the
 " dead, according to the book of Geneva. *Item,*
 " That the communion be ministered *four times* in
 " the year within boroughs, and *twice* in the year
 " in the country parishes. The superintendents
 " were appointed to confer with the Lords of
 " Secret Council, anent the charges to be bestow-

" ed

“ ed for the elements at the Lord’s Supper (p).”

It being reported in the general assembly holden at Montrose, in March 1600, that some abstained from the communion, under colour of deadly feuds, and other light causes, it was ordained, “ That the presbyteries command every particular minister, within their bounds, to take up the names of all within their parish, that they may communicate every year once at least; and thereafter summon them to compear before the presbyteries, to hear and see themselves ordained to communicate within three months after the charge (q).” From this it seems plain, that the sacrament was then dispensed once every three months; and this is my only design in mentioning it; for in other respects it was highly blame-worthy.

The general assembly, met at Glasgow 1638, appointed a committee to consider what constitutions should be revived or made of new. The 12th article of their report was “ anent order to be taken that the Lord’s Supper be more frequently administered, both in burgh and landward, than it hath been these years bygone; it were expedient that the act at Edinburgh, December 25th, 1562, be renewed, and some course be taken for furnishing the elements, where the minister of the parish hath allowance only for once in the year (r).” This shews, that in the times betwixt 1600 and 1638, seldom communicating had again crept in. We all know these times were none of the best. However,

(p) Mr. Wodrow’s copy of Calderwood’s manuscript History, vol. I. p. 792. See also Calderwood’s printed History, p. 816. (q) Ibid. p. 837. (r) Acts of the general assembly from 1638 to 1649, p. 50.

ever, even then there were some, and these the best friends of the *Presbyterian* interest, who dispensed the communion oftener than once a year. I need only mention the celebrated Mr. David Dickson, then at Irvine, who dispensed the communion *twice* in the year (*s*); and Mr. Robert Blair, who dispensed it *four times* in the year, at least after he went over to Bangor, in the county of Down in Ireland, where he was a chief instrument of the great revival of religion in that corner (*t*). If I had leisure to consult the printed or manuscript Lives of other eminent men in these times, I doubt not but many such instances could be given.---But to return; the good men concerned

(*s*) *Christians from many other places of the country resorted to the communions at Irvine twice in the year.* Account of Mr. Dickson in Livingstone's manuscript Account of the Ministers and Professors of his Time, p. 144. of Mr. Wodrow's copy.

(*t*) The work of the Lord began to prosper. Mr. Cunningham of Holywood helped us very much, and his little parish was a good example to ours. We often preached the one for the other. We agreed also among ourselves to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper *eight days* in the year, *four* in his, and *four* in mine. So that proficients in both did all these times communicate together. Mr. Blair's manuscript Account of his own Life, p. 71. of Mr. William Hog's copy. It is evident from that same manuscript, p. 94, 97. that the ministers in the bounds of the county of Down and Antrim, who were many of them Scotsmen, had, at least, one stranger assisting at their communions, and a sermon on the Saturday, and another on the Monday. But all this was in the church where the sacrament was dispensed. For Mr Blair mentions it as something unusual, that, by an unexpected crowd, he was obliged to preach in the court of a castle.

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concerned in the *Reformation* 1638, were sincerely desirous to promote greater frequency in remembering the dying love of Jesus. And accordingly the Assembly referred the above-mentioned article of the *Committee's* report to the consideration of Presbyteries; and declared that the charges should rather be paid out of that day's collection, than that the congregation want the more frequent use of the sacrament.

A pamphlet was printed at Edinburgh, 1641, intituled, *The Order and Discipline of the Church of Scotland*. The author only observes in the general, that the Lord's Supper is more frequently ministered in some congregations than in others, but he does not mention how often in any. He informs us, p. 21. "The Sabbath next, before
" the communion shall be celebrated, public
" warning thereof is made by the pastor, and of
" the doctrine of preparation to be taught the
" last day of the week, or at least towards the
" end of the week, that the communicants may
" be the better prepared by the use of the means
" both in public and private." Here is no mention of any other minister's assisting the minister of the parish, nor of any *Fast-Days* or *Thanksgiving-Days* regularly observed before and after the sacrament. On the contrary, it is said, p. 24.
" The communion being thus celebrated in the
" forenoon, the people meet again in the afternoon, at which time the minister teacheth the
" doctrine of thanksgiving, and closeth the public
" and solemn worship of that day, from which
" the people use to depart refreshed with the grace
" and peace of God, and strengthened with new and
" fresh resolutions to serve the Lord."

In the 14th Session of the Assembly met at Edinburgh 1645, of which Mr. Robert Douglass was Moderator, the opinion of the committee for keeping the greater uniformity in this Kirk was laid before them, and, after serious consideration, approved in all its articles, and ordained to be observed in all time hereafter. Among other things they enjoined, "That there be no reading in the time of communicating, but the minister make a short exhortation at every Table; that thereafter there be *Silence* during the time of the communicants receiving, except only when the minister expresseth some few short sentences, suitable to the present condition of the communicants in their receiving, that they may be incited and quickened in their meditations in the action. That when the communion is to be celebrated in a parish, *one Minister* may be employed for assisting the minister of the parish, or, *at the most, two*. That there be *one Sermon* of preparation, delivered in the ordinary place of public worship, upon the day immediately preceding. That before the serving of the tables, there be only one sermon delivered to those who are to communicate, and that in the same Kirk there be one sermon of thanksgiving after the communion is ended. That the minister who cometh to assist, have a special care to provide his own parish, lest otherwise while he is about to minister comfort to others, his own flock be left destitute of preaching (u)."

(u) Acts of the General Assembly from 1638 to 1649, p. 267, 268.

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It is now time to enquire, how the present rareness of communions, and the multitude of week-days sermons before and after them, was first introduced. And all I can do, is to mention two or three probable conjectures, as I know no certain account of that matter.

It began, says one, in the persecuting times, when many ministers under hiding, and the whole Presbyterians of a country, by stealth, got together. And when they met for this end, it may be once in several years, they knew not how often to preach; and the people had a boundless appetite to hear, so long as they could be subsisted and safe. But though the persecution they were under sufficiently excused their so seldom receiving the Lord's Supper, is it possible for us to vindicate our conduct, who live in quiet and peaceable times? It was necessity with them, and therefore not blame-worthy? It must be choice with us, and therefore criminal.

The author of *Dan in Beertheba*, gives the following account of the matter, from two books printed at London, 1657, (viz. *Uldericus Veridicus sive de statu Ecclesiæ Scoticæ*. And, *A true Representation of the Rise, Progress, and State of the Divisions in the Church of Scotland*,) both of them writ by public Resolutioners. The General Assembly, say they, in the year 1645, did establish an order for preventing confusion in the celebration of the sacrament, with which *the whole church* were satisfied. Yet, since our divisions, our dissenting brethren have taken up a new and irregular way of dispensing the holy Supper, whereby they have turned it, either into a theatrical pomp, or into the *Popish* error of *opus operatum*. It is but seldom they dispense this ordinance. But when it

comes to be administrated in a church where any of them is minister, even they who are in the remotest parts of the kingdom, being warned, flock to them. To those of their own party, of whatever parish, the heavenly bread is distributed, while most of their own parishioners are excluded. They have a great many ministers assisting them, six or seven, nay, sometimes double that number, whose congregations are generally left destitute of preaching that day. Every day of their meeting, viz. Saturday, the Lord's Day, and Monday, (*N. B. They had then no Fast-Days*), many of these ministers do preach successively one after another; so that three or four, or sometimes more, do preach at their *Preparation*, and as many on the Monday following. And on the Sabbath sometimes three or four preach before they go to the *Action*, besides those who preach to the multitude of the people, who cannot be contained in the church. Never before were there so many sermons in any church in so short a time. These practices, as they are a clear violation of the order unanimously established in the church, and do occasion great animosity and alienation of simple people against those ministers who will not imitate those irregular courses; so uninterested observers perceive a clear design in all this, to set up themselves as the only zealous and pious people, worthy to be trusted and followed in our public differences: Which if it be not an injury to that sacred ordinance, and an improving that, which should be a bond of unity and communion, to be a wedge to drive and fix a rent, let the judicious and sober judge.----Possibly some of these reflections were too severe, and dictated by Party Spirit.

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Spirit; yet there is ground to think they were not wholly without foundation.

It is not improbable, that the practice of the ministers of the counties of Down and Antrim, about 1626, many of whom afterwards came over to Scotland, might contribute to multiply sermons, particularly in the fields, before and after communions. But when the Spirit is carrying on a remarkable work of conviction and conversion, as he then was in these counties, things may be fit, which at other times would be highly unseasonable (v).

After the *Revolution*, the Lord's Supper continued to be seldom administered; sermons on the Fast-Day, Saturday, and Monday, were kept up, and many ministers employed to assist. The general assembly 1701, to remedy these things, recommended it to presbyteries, "to take care, "that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper be "more frequently administered in their bounds; "and that the number of ministers to serve "thereat be restricted, so that *neighbouring* "churches be not thereby cast desolate on the "Lord's Day (w)."

The sixth act of the assembly 1711, gives so strong a proof of the zeal of our church for frequent communicating, that I cannot but insert it entire. "The general assembly, considering, "that, in some places, the sacrament of the "Lord's Supper is administered only in the *Summer* "season, where-through people are deprived "of the benefit of that holy ordinance during the "rest of the Year, do therefore recommend to
"presbyteries

(v) See Letter i, p. 40.

(w) Act 19. Assen.

“ presbyteries to do what they can to get it so
 “ ordered, that the sacrament of the Lord’s Sup-
 “ per may be administered in their bounds, thro’
 “ the *several months of the year.*”

The general assembly 1712, “ considering, that
 “ the assemblies of this national church have, by
 “ several acts, appointed the frequent celebra-
 “ tion of the Lord’s Supper in all the congrega-
 “ tions of this church, and judging that the due
 “ observation of these acts will greatly tend to the
 “ glory of God, and edification of souls; there-
 “ fore did enjoin all presbyteries to enquire if the
 “ said acts be duly observed by all the brethren.”

By the *sixth* act of the assembly 1724, act 6th, assembly 1711, is revived and renewed; presbyteries are appointed to do all they can to have the Lord’s Supper more frequently administered in their bounds, throughout the several months of the year; and enjoined to take care, that on the Lord’s Day on which the sacrament is to be administered in any congregation, the neighbouring congregations be supplied with sermons. Presbyteries are appointed to call their respective brethren in their bounds to an account as to the observance of this: And synods to call their respective presbyteries to an account as to what is enjoined them.

The presbytery of Edinburgh, by an act made the 27th of April 1720, did recommend the sacrament to be celebrated in their respective churches, at least the months after-mentioned, *viz.* January in Canongate, February in North-Leith, March in all the churches of Edinburgh, April in Corstorphin, May in South-Leith and Kirk-Newton, June in West-Kirk and Curry, July in Collington and Ratho, and again in Canongate,

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nongate, August in Libberton and Cramond, September again in West-Kirk, October in Dud-dinston, and again in all the churches of Edinburgh, and in November again in South-Leith; and that any parish which cannot conveniently keep their diets above-mentioned, do it in the month of December that year. And that communicants might have more time for private preparation, and that as few ministers as possible might be taken from their own parish work, and so their congregations left without sermon, whereby people, that do not communicate, come and incommode communicants, and profane the Lord's Day by vaguing, idle discourse, and otherwise: *They also agreed*, that there be only two sermons on the Fast-day, one on Saturday, two on the Lord's Day, and one on Monday, that neighbouring ministers should provide their churches with sermon, and exhort such as were not to communicate to keep their own parish churches; and gave it as their opinion, that there should be no Church-yard sermons on such occasions (x). These alterations, inconsiderable as they were, occasioned a terrible outcry: And many elders and private Christians left their own ministers. But, in a short time, this heat subsided, and the best and greatest part of them saw that a separation on such grounds would be criminal. This was the more remarkable, as the number of sermons was greatly lessened, without increasing in any reasonable proportion the number of communions,

(x) See *Dan an Adder in the Path*; or, *Considerations on the new Scheme of Communions in the Presbytery of Edinburgh*, p. 6. And *Dan in Beerfields*; or, *the Idolatry of Communion Sermons*, p. 11.

munions, which it is no wonder some should be uncharitable enough to ascribe to the laziness of ministers. Whereas the synod of Glasgow's overture is not liable to such a misrepresentation, the number of communions in every congregation being increased, and at the same time as many sermons on week days, in the course of a year, as there are in our present way.

I shall only ask my reader, are our times better than the reformation and covenanting periods, when our church approached much nearer to the primitive simplicity in dispensing the Supper of the Lord? Has our church gained any thing, has practical religion been increased by the change of the old for our present way? Does it not deserve inquiry, if our neglect of frequently communicating, be not one cause, why *the love of many has waxed cold*?

SECTION III.

I NOW proceed to consider some of the principal objections against frequent communicating. And,

I. It is alledged, that "the primitive Christians were so eminent in religion, and so well prepared for the sacrament, that weekly communions might, in their time, be highly expedient; but that, in our degenerate times, the case is altered, and our frequently partaking, considering our low attainments in grace, would be highly dangerous."

But, if our attainments are so low, *is there not a cause*? And what cause more probable, than our seldom attendance on that ordinance, which

our

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Our Lord intended as the principal means of keeping up a lively sense of his dying love? Besides, as Calvin well observes (a), the weaker our graces are, the greater is our need of frequent attendance on this ordinance, to strengthen and increase them. It ought also to be remembered, that even the primitive church had *spots in their feasts of charity*. St. Paul does not describe a Christian deportment in the church meetings of the Corinthians: but he no where advises them to communicate seldomer, but only enjoins them to do it in a more becoming manner.

§ 2. II. *The Jewish passover was celebrated only once a year; therefore, say some, the Lord's Supper, which comes in its place, should be dispensed no oftener.* To this I reply, in the words of Mr. Charnock (b), the passover indeed was annual. God fixed it to that time; but they had their daily sacrifices in the temple, which were types of Christ, and remembrancers to them of what was in time to be exhibited. We have no ordinance settled by Christ in commemoration of his death but this only.

§ 3. III. But the argument on which most stress is laid, is, that frequency will lessen the solemnity of the ordinance, and bring it into contempt. They argue thus, "affections are wound up to a higher pitch by the novelty and
G "rarity

(a) Quo enim majore imbecillitate premimur, eo majus ac frequentius in eo exerceri debemus, quod tum ad confirmandam fidem nostram, tum etiam ad sanctitatem vite promovendam, nobis usui esse & potest & debet. Calvin de coena Domini, in Tract. Theol. Genev. 1617. fol. p. 5. (b) Charnock's works, vol. II. p. 756.

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“ rarity of any thing, whereas the commonness of
 “ a thing, however excellent it be, causes them to
 “ flag and cool. Scarcity advanceth, plenty abat-
 “ eth the value of every thing. Those acts of
 “ worship, which are frequently, are also slightly
 “ performed: and since we cannot preserve both,
 “ we had better part with frequency than reve-
 “ rence. For we shall more honour our Lord, by
 “ partaking of his supper more reverently, tho’
 “ less frequently, than more frequently with less
 “ reverence. Accordingly, how poor are the
 “ fruits of this ordinance in the church of Eng-
 “ land, where it is so frequently dispensed?”

To this I reply,

(1.) If frequent communicating is a duty, then danger of doing it with less advantage does not lessen our obligations to that duty. For whatever danger there is, God foresaw it, but yet did not see meet to guard against it, by enjoining us to communicate seldom. Shall we then pretend to be wiser than God? and to have found out better means for securing the honour of his institutions, than the means prescribed and practised by those who were under the infallible guidance of his Spirit? Have not attempts of this kind proved the source of the worst corruptions in popery? Reason has no power to dispense with, or to derogate from the positive laws of God, on pretence of doing them a service. It is blasphemous presumption, tho’ it may put on a cloak of humility, to judge that a sufficient reason to hinder thee from frequent communicating, which our Lord did not judge a sufficient reason to hinder him from commanding it. *If thou thus judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.* Is there in the

whole

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whole Bible, any express or tacit dispensation from frequent communicating, if we happen to imagine, that frequency will lessen our reverence? Disobedience to Christ is no part of the respect we owe to the Lord's table. *To obey is better than sacrifice.* Our Lord did not say, honour the sacrament, or dread it, or admire it, or adore it, but partake of it. We are not therefore at liberty to substitute any other mark of respect to this ordinance, in room of partaking of it. How singularly unfortunate is the command, *Do this in remembrance of me*, to be disobeyed from too much regard?

(2.) Conjecture is lighter than experience. Let us then see, whether the objection is verified or disproved by matter of fact. And here, on the one side, the history of the primitive church, for more than three hundred years, proves, that constancy and reverence happily conspired together to God's glory and his churches benefit. But, on the other hand, when succeeding ages attempted, by lessening the frequency to increase the reverence, the consequence was, that, by degrees, the very being of the ordinance was in danger of being lost, and a multitude of the most terrible mischiefs, and particularly a general decay of the power of godliness, overspread the *Christian world*. Was there not more religion in Scotland, at the reformation and covenanting periods, when communions were more frequent? Since that ordinance began to be seldomer dispensed amongst us, has religion been a gainer? Does not the gospel thrive as well, and are not communions as much honoured with the Redeemer's presence in New-England (where, in some places, the communion is dispensed once every month, and

in all at least once in the two months) as it does with us?---As to the church of England, I can prove from the writings of some of their divines, that tho' they absurdly enough read the communion service almost every sabbath and holiday, yet that, in most parish churches, it is only dispensed thrice a year, and even then the communicants few. Nay, as I remarked in the preceding section, so early as the time of Cartwright and Calderwood, infrequency in communicating was objected to the church of England. So that whatever contempt may be poured on the Lord's table by any in that church, will never prove the objection well grounded.

(3.) Does not the Bible speak strongly on the solemnity of prayer, and the danger of rashness in speaking to God? And does it not tell us, that the word when heard unworthily, is *a savour of death unto death*? Shall we then pray seldom, and hear the word seldom, that we may do it with the greater solemnity; and so not expose ourselves to the danger of praying unworthily, and hearing unworthily? Would not this way of reasoning be fallacious, if applied to prayer, and hearing the word? And is it not equally so, when applied to the sacrament? The godly will not quit their reverence to the Lord's table upon any the greatest frequency, as appears by their uniting frequency and reverence in other religious institutions. And the shew of reverence the ungodly bring to it, is not worth the preserving: and much less is it worth the purchasing at so dear a rate, as the depriving saints of this ordinance.

(4.) Prayer,

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(4.) Prayer, hearing the word, &c. are not less useful by reason of their frequency. Those who abound in them most, find most benefit in them. The same may be said of meditation, self-examination, and other religious exercises. Why then should it be supposed, that rareness in remembering Christ's death in the sacrament, should add to the effect of that ordinance?—Novelty, it must be owned, adds a force to every thing. Fulness brings cheapness on the very bread of life: yet who would infer from this, that it ought to be withheld till famine enhance the price? Or that we ought to be seldom in preaching the great and heart-affecting truths of the gospel, lest by oftener insisting on them, they should affect less?

I shall conclude this head with the words of Mr. Charnock (c), "To be frequent in communicating is agreeable to the nature of the ordinance, and necessary for the wants of a Christian. By too much fasting we often lose our stomachs. Too much deferring does more hurt than frequent communicating. The oftener we carefully and believingly communicate, the more disposed we shall be for it. If it be worthily received, it increaseth our reverence of God, and affection to him. And that is the best reverence of God which owneth his authority. Christ's death is to be every day fixed in our thoughts; and to help our weakness, there should be a frequent representation of it to our senses, in such a way as Christ has instituted, not as men may prescribe."

§ 4.

(c) Charnock, ubi supra, and p. 747.

§ 4. IV. But it will still be urged, "That
 " partaking of the Lord's Supper is the nearest
 " approach we can make on earth to the great
 " and dreadful God, and therefore requires such
 " awe and reverence, and such degrees of so-
 " lemn preparation, as would be utterly impos-
 " sible, were that ordinance frequently dispens-
 " ed."

I grant many pious and excellent divines have said this and a great deal more. But where does the Scripture say so? *To the law, and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because, in so far, there is no light in them.*

We ought never to approach God in any ordinance without a reverent, penitent, humble frame, and a heart broken for sin. But it would be a strange inference, that therefore there ought to be a fast-day, with three sermons, and a preparation day, with two sermons, before every time the sacrament is dispensed. These dispositions are necessary in every approach to God in other ordinances, and therefore if public fasts and preparations are necessary before the sacrament, they are necessary before them also. We seem to have made a distinction in this matter, beyond what we have warrant for in the word of God, as if this ordinance were placed at a greater distance from others, than it really is.

The vast preparations the people of the Jews were obliged to make before the promulgation of the law, are urged in support of this notion (d). And from the misapplication of such passages of scripture, many of the best of Christians

(d) See Exod. xix, xx. chap.

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tians approach their reconciled God and Father with a slavish awe, like that of the Israelites, when approaching the mount that burned with fire; or that of Peter, when he said to our Lord, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.* They sit down at the table of the Lord, with as great terror as the high priest entered the holiest of all on the day of atonement, when, for the very least accidental miscarriage or inadvertency, during his short stay there, he was in danger of being struck dead. Doubtless the seldom dispensing this ordinance has led many of the less judicious into such melancholy superstitious apprehensions, and raised such terrors in their mind, that they could not attend upon God in this institution without distraction, and thus were deprived of much of the comfort and benefit, which otherwise they would have reaped from it. Such I would entreat to consider the differences of the legal and evangelical dispensation, and of the spirit of bondage flowing from the one, and the spirit of adoption which suits the other, as represented to us, Rom. viii. 15. Gal. iv. 25, 26. Heb. iv. 16. x. 19,—22. and xii. 18,—24.

And here I cannot but take occasion to remark, that the day of atonement was the *only anniversary day of fasting*, humiliation and confession of sins which God enjoined the Israelites. All their other annual holidays, except these which they themselves appointed, after their return from the Babylonish captivity, were days of joy and thanksgiving (*e*). If then the Jews had more thanksgivings than fasts, why should not the Christians? Is not our cause of joy greater?

§ 5.

(*e*) Universal History, vol. III. octavo edition, p. 44.

§ 5. V. But we are told, that "introducing frequent communions is an *innovation*, and "that all innovations are dangerous."---But it is an innovation in no other sense, than the doctrine of justification by faith was in the days of Luther. The truest and purest antiquity is on our side: whereas our present practice is a plain defection from the primitive pattern.

§ 6. VI. It is further argued, that "the greatest part of well-disposed people in Scotland are "averse to this change."

But in matters of doctrine and worship, we should take our direction only from the word of God, since the best and wisest of Men have erred, and may err; and it is natural to most people, to be prejudiced against any thing in religion, to which they have not been accustomed. In the present question, I have met with many of the most solid and experienced Christians, who have declared, that frequent communions in the way proposed, would be highly desirable. But they added, that the bulk of good people were so keen against it, that they thought it should not be attempted. Whereas, I have reason to think, that if good men who approve the overture, were but half as honest in telling their sentiments, and half as zealous to make proselytes, as those who disapprove it, in a very short time, most who have any relish for religion, would drop their opposition, and pray for its success. But generally those on the wrong side of a question, are most clamorous and noisy.

If great names were of any weight in such a debate, I could easily multiply authorities. But I shall content myself with mentioning the few that follow.

Calvin

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Calvin handles this subject with great accuracy in his institutions, lib. iv. cap. 17. § 44,---46. He tells us it was then the practice, to receive the communion but once a year, and that in a formal, superficial manner (*f*). And after having urged frequent communicating from the design of the ordinance, and the practice of the apostolic and primitive church, he adds, "And doubtless the custom of communicating only once a year, is the invention of the devil, who ever was the instrument of introducing it." And a little after. "Our practice ought to be the very reverse. *Every week at least*, the Lord's table should be spread before the assembly of Christians, and the promises upon which they should feed there opened up to them. None indeed should be forced to it, but all should be exhorted and encouraged (*g*)."

Mr. Baxter, in his Christian Directory, part II. p. 101. having proposed the question, how often should the sacrament be now administered, that it neither grow into contempt nor strangeness? He thus answers it.

H

Ordi-

(*f*) Hæc abunde ostendunt, sacramentum non institutum ideo fuisse, ut semel quotannis acciperetur, idque perfunctorie, ut nunc communiter moris est. § 44.

(*g*) Et sane hæc consuetudo quæ semel quotannis communicare jubet, certissimum est Diaboli inventum, cujusunque tandem ministerio invec̃ta fuerit. *Et paulo post.* Longe aliter factum oportuit. Singulis ad minimum heptomadibus proponenda erat Christianorum cœtui mensa Domini, declarandæ promissiones, quæ nos in ea spiritualiter pascere. Nullus quidem necessitate cogendus, sed cohortandi omnes & stimulandi. § 46.

Ordinarily, in well disciplined churches, it should be still every Lord's day. For, (1.) We have no reason to prove, that the apostles example and appointment in this case was proper to those times, any more than that praise and thanksgiving daily is proper to them: and we may as well deny the obligation of other institutions or apostolical orders, as that. (2.) It is a part of the settled order for the Lord's day's worship, and omitting it, *maimeth and altereth the worship of the day*, and occasioneth the omission of the thanksgiving and praise, and lively commemorations of Christ, which should be then most performed; and so Christians, by use, grow habited to fadness, and a mourning melancholy religion, and grow unacquainted with much of the worship and spirit of the gospel. (3.) Hereby the Papists lamentable corruptions of this ordinance have grown up, even by an excess of reverence and fear, which seldom receiving doth increase, till they are come to worship bread as their God. (4.) By seldom communicating, men are seduced to think all proper *communion of churches* lieth in that *sacrament*, and to be more profanely bold in abusing many other parts of worship. (5.) There are better means, by teaching and discipline, to keep the *sacrament* from contempt, than the omitting or displacing of it. (6.) Every Lord's day is no oftener than Christians need it. (7.) The frequency will teach them to live prepared, and not only to make much ado once a month, or quarter, when the same work is neglected all the year beside; even as one that liveth in continual expectation of death, will live in continual preparation: when he that expecteth

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eth it but in some grievous sickness, will then be frightened into some seeming preparations, which are not the habit of his soul, but laid by again when the disease is over.

But yet I must add, that in some undisciplined churches, and upon some occasions, it may be longer omitted, or seldomer used. No duty is a duty at all times. And therefore extraordinary cases may raise such impediments, as may hinder us a long time from this, and many other privileges. But the ordinary faultiness of our imperfect hearts, that are apt to grow customary and dull, is no good reason why it should be seldom, any more than why other special duties of worship and church communion should be seldom. Read well the epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, and you will find that they were then as bad as the true Christians are now, and that even in the sacrament they were very culpable; and yet Paul seeketh not to cure them by their seldomer communicating. Thus far Mr. Baxter.

A worthy minister in the shire of Ayr, in a letter to me, dated October 10th, argues thus,
“ What a reproach is it to the church of Scotland, which boasts of a farther degree of reformation than even some other protestant churches, to fall so far, I had almost said, so scandalously short of them all, in commemorating the dying love of our blessed Redeemer?
“ I know it is alledged, frequently communicating will lessen our reverence for the sacrament. But the contrary will, I presume, abundantly appear, by comparing those who do now communicate four times, and oftener, in the year, with those who never think of it
H 2 “ above

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“ above once. And whatever may be the case
“ with respect to those who do not perform religious
“ duties in a serious manner at all, yet
“ as to those who do, I believe it will be found,
“ that the more frequently real Christians are
“ exercised in them, whether praying, reading,
“ hearing, meditating, or communicating, they
“ are apt to acquire still higher degrees of perfection,
“ in these useful exercises.

“ As to abridging the number of sermons, &c.
“ besides the obvious necessity of this, in order
“ to the greater frequency of that ordinance, I
“ think it seems to be allowed, by most thinking
“ people, that we have got into rather a
“ too mobish way, I may call it, of administering
“ that serious and solemn ordinance. I
“ dare say, that if a computation were to be
“ made, it would be found, that in some places
“ where there are not above 500 or 600 communicants,
“ there will be, at least upon the
“ Lord's day, near as many thousand people,
“ most of whom must be at least idle and irreverent
“ spectators, or rather disturbers; not only
“ crowding the passages, so as renders it next to
“ impossible for weak and infirm people to go
“ to and from the table with due composure, but
“ in a constant motion to and from ale-houses,
“ yards, and other places, where barrels are
“ kept for the entertainment of successive companies,
“ whose conversation generally gives offence
“ to every serious Christian, that accidentally
“ over-hears it.”

Let none think, says Mr. Willison of Dundee,
that frequency of the administration would expose
to contempt: for I am sure no worthy communicant

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municant will undervalue this ordinance because of a frequent repetition, but rather prize it the more. Did the primitive Christians bring it into contempt by partaking every Lord's day? Nay, was not their esteem of it much higher than these who dispense or receive it only once in two years? I wish the words of our *dying Saviour*, and the acts of our *general assembly*, relative to this matter, were more adverted to by one and all of us (*h*).----And in another place, he thus answers the question, *Are we as much obliged to frequent communicating as the apostles and primitive Christians were?* Though they were in a much better frame for it, as having had more recent and warm impressions of the love and death of their Redeemer constantly upon their spirits than we have; yet certainly we are under as strong obligations to frequent partaking as the first Christians were: for we have the same Lord and Saviour that they had, and are under the same obligations of love and gratitude to him. We have the same need of the application of Christ's blood, and a confirmed interest in his meritorious death, that they had; and consequently the same need of this memorial feast and sealing ordinance (*i*). And answering the question, *Is not frequency apt to breed formality in this duty?* He observes, (1.) The same thing may be alledged with respect to other duties, which yet is no good argument for the unfrequent practice of them. (2.) This fault is nowise chargeable upon the holy ordinance and institution of Christ, but

(*h*) Willifon's preface to his *Sacramental Catechism*, p. 9.

(*i*) *Sacramental Catechism*, p. 86.

but upon the corruption and carelessness of our hearts, which we ought diligently to watch and strive against; endeavouring, in Christ's strength, as often as we partake, so often to prepare for it, with all due care and solemnity (k).

Mr. Jonathan Edwards, of Northampton in New-England, in a book, intitled, *Some thoughts concerning the present revival of religion*, p. 214. of the Edinburgh edition, says, "It seems plain, by the scripture, that the primitive Christians were wont to celebrate this memorial of the sufferings of their dear Redeemer every Lord's day; and so, I believe, it will be again in the church of Christ, in days that are approaching."

§ 7. VII. It is alledged, *increasing the frequency of communions, especially in the way proposed in the synod's overture, will occasion a new and formidable secession.*

But, as Mr. Randal has well observed, in a paper referred to, Section IV. § 1. "Most who would leave a church on so frivolous a pretence, are in the secession already: and probably the present way of administering the sacrament may be one cause of it. Too nice a picking of ministers at these times, taught the people to despise some, whom now the best amongst us would willingly pull out of their graves, if they could. The secession is now less formidable through their division." And the party of them who befriend the burges's oath, have, of late, expressed so much moderation and charity to the church of Scotland, in some of their
printed

(k) Sacramental Catechism, p. 87.

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printed papers (1), that I cannot bring myself to think they would condemn an overture so highly reasonable. When people see that it is not laziness; but a subjection to the authority of Christ, and regard to their edification, that make us desirous of more frequent communions, their prejudices will subside. And should it be otherwise, the affections of our people, valuable as they are, would be too dearly purchased, by disregard to the commands of Jesus.

SECTION IV.

I AM now to enquire, whether the synod's overture is not the most proper, and least exceptionable means to promote frequent communicating. I shall not be stiff in asserting this: but hitherto no better plan has been proposed, that I know of. I chuse, in this part of the subject, to deliver my sentiments in the words of two worthy ministers, who have thought much on the question.

The one is Mr. Willison of Dundee, preface to his Sacramental Catechism, p. 12. "I confess there is one thing amongst us, which is
" a great obstruction to the frequent celebration
" of this ordinance, viz. the great numbers of
" ministers and preachers now used on such occasions, which truly makes that solemn work
" a business of such outward toil and labour to
" the administrators, as discourages them frequently

(1) See Mr. Hutton's Speech, p. 55. Mr. Ralph Erskine's Review of Mr. Gib's Remarks, p. 17. and Synod Sermon, p. 32.

"quently to undertake it. So that till some re-
 "gulation be made in the aforesaid respect, I
 "despair of seeing this holy ordinance dispensed
 "so frequently amongst us as it ought to be.---
 "In the days of old, there was less preaching at
 "communions, but much power and life in them;
 "but in our days there is much preaching, but
 "little power. Not that I am against much
 "preaching at these occasions, where there is an
 "appetite among the hearers, and where plenty
 "of ministers may be had, without laying
 "the neighbouring congregations desolate, or
 "proving any let to the frequency of this ordi-
 "nance: but to make it a *standing order*, that
 "there shall be so many preachings, whether
 "there be an appetite or no, or whatever in-
 "conveniencies should follow, I apprehend can-
 "not be so easily justified. I acknowledge, about
 "the time of our late happy *revolution*, when
 "so much preaching at communions began to be
 "a settled practice, there were such vehement
 "desires among the people after the ordinances,
 "and lively preaching of the word, that had
 "been so scarce for so many years before, that
 "it was necessary to gratify them, with much
 "preaching, at these solemn occasions; but it is
 "not to be expected, that these longings should
 "always continue. In the primitive times of
 "Christianity, when the disciples hearts flowed
 "with love to their lately crucified and ascend-
 "ed Redeemer, they had such burning desires
 "after the ordinances, and preaching of the
 "gospel, that the apostle Paul, at the celebra-
 "tion of the Lord's Supper, Acts xx. 7. was
 "encouraged to continue preaching with the
 "people

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“ people till midnight ; yet none ever pled, that
“ the apostle’s practice, on that occasion, should
“ be a standing rule for the church, in all time
“ coming.”

The other is Mr. Randal of Inchtute, in a written paper, where a plan much like that of our synod is proposed. And as that paper first engaged me to apply my thoughts to this important subject, I shall insert the greatest part of it.

“ Our present manner, says he, of partaking
“ of the sacrament, by employing three working
“ days in attendance on preaching, on every
“ such occasion, renders the frequent partaking
“ of that ordinance inconvenient, if not impossible. For,

“ (1.) It is hard to bring our people to relinquish a frequent administration, if it must deprive them of so many days of labour. And as industry and improvement increase, that difficulty will increase also ; especially, as some concerned in these things, have not so great a respect, as might be wished, for religious institutions. But if all were willing to attend, there are not many seasons where, in landward parishes, they can have leisure, especially as the lint improvement goes on, which much shortens the leisure time in summer.

“ (2.) Though ministers may not speak it out, the expence, with which dispensing the sacrament frequently in our way would be attended, will ever be an effectual stop to it.

“ (3.) Our present way is very inconvenient to every single minister. As almost all have the sacrament once a year, each must assist five or six neighbours ; and this hurries and hin-

ders, in a great measure, from that solemnity of thought, which is only to be found in calm retirement. In the parish where the sacrament is dispensed, the minister's wife and family must be all Marthas, and no time allowed them to look after the better part.

(4.) It is equally inconvenient to ministers as a society. It often proves the source of heart-burning, misunderstanding, party, and faction amongst us. Though we have a regard to a neighbour, yet the aversion of our parish to him, sometimes not well founded too, tempts us to purchase peace at home, by overlooking him on such occasions: and this proves a wound that can scarcely be healed. But by dispensing this ordinance in its primitive simplicity, one occasion of distance and interferences will be removed, and brotherly love promoted.-----Sometimes jealousies, that such a candidate for a vacant congregation would not employ us, but popular men from a distance, at his communions, occasions us, underhand to oppose his settlement. Every new settlement is half my own, says the neighbour: half my peace and comfort depends upon it. In the way now proposed, there could be no room for such suspicions, and therefore it is probable candour and friendship would more prevail.

(5.) In our present way, there can, in most places, be no feast in the winter.

If it be alledged, That this will prevent peoples being edified as they now are by a diversity of gifts. I answer,

(1.) We

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“(1.) We cannot expect the church should
 “ be edified by neglecting the means the Head of
 “ the church has appointed for their edification,
 “ (of which frequent remembering him in the
 “ breaking of bread is one) and substituting,
 “ in their room, means of our own devising.
 “ For our Lord has nowhere prescribed a mul-
 “ titude of sermons on such occasions, as a means
 “ of our edification. Whereas, in receiving the
 “ bread and wine, he has promised his special
 “ presence.

“(2.) Four preparation days in the course of
 “ a year, may procure as great a variety of gifts
 “ as we now have. Besides, congregations may
 “ and ought to fast often, in which way diver-
 “ sity of gifts may be obtained, without neglec-
 “ ting the dying command of Christ.”

§ 2. It was hinted to me, by a worthy and
 judicious friend, that communions might be had
 in our present way, if ministers were confined
 to one assistant; and if the minister of the parish,
 and that one assistant preached each of them three
 or four times: or if that should be reckoned bur-
 densome, week-days sermons might be got from
 probationers, or even from neighbouring mini-
 sters, without asking their assistance, and thus
 throwing their churches vacant on the Lord's
 day.

If I can be convinced, that frequent commu-
 nions may be had in this way, without danger of
 superstition, or hurt to society, I shall not be the
 first to decline such a plan. I own, it is free
 from some objections which startle people at our
 synod's overture: but, to me, it seems liable to
 greater difficulties of another kind.

(1.) Would not this take up ministers as much, or more, from private preparation, as our present way, which I have heard many complain of on that account?

(2.) How few probationers are there in many corners? And could their assistance be more easily procured, how disagreeable would our employing of them be to some congregations?

(3.) Would it not be hard on poor people, and occasion the murmurs of others, that a parish, four times every year, should spend three entire working days, in the space of a week, in religious exercises? And would not this hardship appear greater to people, when there was little variety of gifts, only their own minister and one assistant?

(4.) Employing neighbouring ministers will not remove the difficulties mentioned in the last head.—But I own, though some may think it a paradox, it is my judgment, that neighbours ought never to be employed at sacraments. For there are some who will not, and others who dare not, employ their neighbours. And this being looked on as a piece of contempt, is an unhappy source of division amongst us. Whereas, if it were the custom, always to employ people from a distance, every one, without giving umbrage to any of his brethren, would employ whom he pleased.

§ 3. It is objected, that a multitude of congregations will be thrown vacant by our overture: for if the sacrament be dispensed through a whole presbytery on the same day, sixteen or eighteen parishes in neighbouring presbyteries must be thrown vacant to supply them with assistants. But,

(1.) Though

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(1.) Though many congregations will, no doubt, be thrown vacant, even by our overture; yet it will not be a whole countryside of contiguous congregations, as is the case at present; for the assistants will be got from different presbyteries, and some ministers will seek none.

(2.) In our present way, the same parish is often vacant five Sabbaths in the space of ten or twelve weeks: But if the overture succeed, this can scarce ever happen.

§ 4. It has been urged, that celebrating the sacrament four times in the year, will scarce be practicable in some parts of the Highlands, and therefore ought not to be bound upon them by an act: And that it would be highly inconvenient for a whole presbytery there to have the sacrament the same day, as they would find it hard to be supplied with assistants from neighbouring presbyteries, considering the great distance.-----I believe, none will oppose altering or amending the overture in this respect, if once it were known what is the alteration which northern synods would judge most for their benefit.

§ 5. Some were of opinion, that abridging the number of sermons more gradually might perhaps prevent the opposition which the overture, in its present form, will undoubtedly meet with. To this I reply, in the words of a worthy Member of this Synod.

“ As to correcting these abuses gradually, it is
“ highly probable, that any such half or faint
“ attempt, would defeat its own design. Pusil-
“ lanimous assailants are easily beat back. The
“ abuses complained of are such, as we may
“ boldly avow our design to correct: Whereas,

“ if we conceal this design, or seem ashamed to
 “ profess it, this very conduct will harden such
 “ of our people as may be wedded to the present
 “ way, in their prejudices. Palliatives will look
 “ more like slothfulness in ourselves: Whereas,
 “ if we boldly avow the whole design at once,
 “ the abuses which we aim at will be allowed, I
 “ believe, to be indefensible, and the remedy
 “ proposed must be admitted to be the only cure:
 “ And, by that means, a conviction, I think,
 “ will be more easily fastened upon our people.
 “ Besides, as nobody proposes to stop at the first
 “ step, the very slowness of our procedure will
 “ encourage and occasion opposition, at least pro-
 “ tract and lengthen it out. Every new step may
 “ be expected to raise as great a clamour as the
 “ whole would do, which in the one case would
 “ be over at once, whereas in the other case
 “ it would be constantly fed by fresh springs.
 “ And the people having once declared them-
 “ selves, as this would involve them in a con-
 “ stant opposition to every further alteration,
 “ before they really could perceive the reason-
 “ ableness of the whole that was intended, so it
 “ would render it more unpopular in ministers,
 “ to be so often flying in the face of what is al-
 “ ready discovered to be so unpopular. What
 “ happened at the first establishment of the pre-
 “ sent *Version* of the *Psalms*, is an evidence what
 “ an advantage it is to accomplish any consider-
 “ able alteration all at once. It was extremely
 “ unpopular, as it may easily be imagined, any
 “ thing that had the appearance of altering the
 “ *Bible* would be. But as the thing was boldly
 “ begun over all Scotland on the same day, and
 “ ministers

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“ ministers were united among themselves, the
“ noise made against it was very soon over.”

§ 6. Some have observed, that *providential incidents or a remarkable down-pouring of the Spirit, may make it reasonable to have week-days sermons, at a communion, on other days, as well as the Saturday; and that therefore it is a strange overture, that for four weeks of the year Christ may not be preached on a week-day, except once, let it be never so convenient.* I heartily agree, that though ten thousand general assemblies would make such an act, our obedience to it would be sinful. But, did the Presbyterians, by abolishing Christmas, &c. enjoin, that Christ should never be preached on these days? No doubt, that was far from their intention. A positive injunction, that there should be no sermons on the Thursday before, or the Monday after the communion, would be criminal. And so would a positive injunction, that there should be no sermon on the 30th of January, or the 25th of December. But it would not be unworthy of our church, to give it as her judgment, that the stated week-days sermons, which have been in use in Scotland before and after communions, have not a great deal more foundation in the word of God; than the anniversaries of the church of England.

Time will not allow me to consider other objections. The public may expect soon a more distinct defence of the synod's overture, by the Reverend Mr. Randal. I have perused, with pleasure, since part of this essay was sent to the press, and almost all of it composed, the first three sheets of his manuscript, in which are many new
and

and ingenious proofs, that communicating as often as the primitive church did, is our duty (*m*).

May God send forth his light and his truth, to lead us, and guide us, and to bring us to his holy habitation. May we be willing meekly and humbly to receive the law from his mouth. And if our eye be thus single, our whole body shall be full of light.

(*m*) Though Mr. Randal handles the argument in a different method from me, and there are very few particulars in which we coincide, yet I think myself bound to acquaint the Public, they would not have been troubled with this hasty Essay, if I had seen Mr. Randal's papers before composing it; or if any thing of value had been published in support of the Synod's Overture, so timeously, as that it could have been dispersed before the meeting of Glasgow Presbytery, the third Wednesday of this month, (*viz.* January 1749.)



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